RECOMMENDATION

Refer the selection of a replacement tree for downtown Castro Street to the Parks and Recreation Commission and return to Council with a preferred street tree along with two alternates, a cost estimate and replacement schedule.

FISCAL IMPACT

Replacement cost for 170 trees is estimated at $51,000 or $300 per tree. Cost includes removal and stumping of existing trees and replacement with a new 15-gallon tree.

BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS

As part of the downtown redevelopment efforts and redesign of Castro Street and City Hall in the late 1980s, selection of a new street tree was an important element. The City looked for a tree species that would enhance the pedestrian-friendly environment envisioned by the precise plan and eventually produce an attractive allee of thriving, same-sized trees. A subcommittee chose *robinia* (locust), a deciduous, drought-tolerant, flowering tree, as the street tree for Castro Street. In the past, this species had been considered problematic for use as a street tree because of its brittle wood and aggressive roots. However, a new, recently introduced cultivar, *Robinia ambigua "Idahoensis"* (Idaho locust), promised to overcome these disadvantages. One hundred seventy (170) of these trees were planted on Castro Street.

Over the years, the Idaho locust has not performed as planned and has experienced three major problems:

- The wood is relatively brittle and branches split frequently in high winds. Many of the trees along Castro Street have been damaged, whether it was a major leader or the entire tree which failed. There are currently 12 vacant tree wells and an additional 42 trees with structural damage from storms. Over the past four years, 22 trees have been replaced due to storm damage. The allee of thriving, same-sized trees has not materialized.

- The tree requires considerable maintenance:

  — Yearly pruning is required to minimize branch failure and breakage. On average, a crew of four Tree Trimmers takes approximately six days to complete this task. This is an average of $6,700 for a complete trim cycle. By comparison, most street trees are typically pruned on a four- to seven-year cycle.

  — Monitoring of aphid populations. Idaho locust is highly susceptible to this soft-bodied insect. Honey dew secretions from the insect create a "sticky" mess below the tree which causes a problem, particularly with outdoor dining. On occasion, soap spraying is required when aphid populations reach "critical mass."

  — The shedding of older leaves throughout the summer season requires additional vacuuming by downtown maintenance crews. Between June and September, the crew devotes in the range of an additional 100 hours to this task at an average cost of $3,350.

- Due to their brittleness, removal (and stumping) of damaged trees is often required and is labor-intensive. Tree guards and grates must be removed. The planting space is surrounded by concrete, irrigation bubblers and electrical outlets, which rule out the use of a stump grinder. As such, removal must, in most cases, be done by hand.

This matter was agendized for discussion at the request of the Parks and Recreation Commission (Commission) on April 9, 2003 (Attachment 1) at which time it voted unanimously to forward the attached memorandum to Council (Attachment 2). The memorandum outlines the problems associated with the Idaho locust and requests consideration of a possible replacement tree for Castro Street.

ALTERNATIVE

Keep Idaho locust as the selected street tree on Castro Street.

PUBLIC NOTICING—Agenda posting.

Prepared by: Approved by:

Bruce Hurlburt   David A. Muela
Forestry and Roadway Landscape   Community Services Director
  Manager (Interim)

                                                    Kevin C. Duggan
                                                    City Manager

BH/9/CAM
214-05-27-03M-E^

Attachments: 1.   Excerpt from Parks and Recreation Commission Minutes of April 9, 2003
               2.   Memorandum to Council Dated April 10, 2003